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SUBJECT: SAMOA H1N1 CASES INCREASE, SAMOAN PRIME MINISTER POSSIBLE VICTIM

11. SUMMARY: Samoa H1N1 cases escalate to 29 confirmed; Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi among suspected cases.

12. The Samoa Ministry of Health confirmed thirteen additional individuals to have tested positive in Samoa for the H1N1 influenza to bring the tally of confirmed positive cases to twenty nine.

13. The latest confirmations come after the Ministry received this week test results sent to New Zealand after 38 students of a high school on the island of Savai'i were tested and quarantined. The high school students were tested after clusters of students with symptoms of the H1N1 checked into local hospitals a week after hosting students and visitors from New Zealand and Australia.

14. The Samoa Ministry of Health (MOH) stated in a press release that the new confirmed cases show an increasing pattern of local transmissions, contrasting the previous tally had contracted the virus overseas, the new thirteen confirmations (in one week) show none had traveled overseas but contracted the virus locally.

15. MOH has stepped up combat against the influenza from prevention phase moving also into a containment of spread phase. All twenty nine cases have been quarantined in their respective homes with Public Health personnel conducting family visits twice a day. With the rise in cases so has pressure on MOH staff in tracking each person with whom the confirmed cases have come into contact.

16. Currently there is a stock of 1,750 courses of years-old tamiflu in country with the National Hospital Pharmacy (not including private stocks at private pharmacies and hospitals), stock left (unused) from the Bird Flu pandemic preparedness program. GOS has another USD 370,000 in emergency preparedness funds which have been earmarked to purchase more supplies of the anti-viral drug. There has also been a commitment from the South Pacific Forum, and from the World Health Organization for supplies and talks of People's Republic of China; however as of date no fresh tamiflu drugs have arrived in country, and no time has been set for the promised aid to arrive. During New Zealand PM John Key visit to Samoa July 7-8, NZ pledged assistance but did not detail the ways or value of support in the event the pandemic further escalates. GOS is heavily subsidizing dosages sold at the National Hospital Pharmacy to confirmed cases with special prescription at USD \$3.80 per course of 10 tablets (and promising free treatment for unemployed). Private pharmacies are reported to be selling courses at USD \$74 per course of 10 tablets.

17. On July 15, local media reported that a swab taken from the Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi was sent to Wellington, NZ for tests on H1N1 after the PM has been under the weather over the past week. His tests results are expected to be returned early next week. The paper noted his high risk category being someone who has frequent contact with foreign travelers.

18. Although no case of H1N1 has been confirmed among 20 Embassy staffers or their family members, prevention vigil stays strong with constant notices and reminders on proper sanitation procedures. The Embassy has a stock of 60 courses of tamiflu in stock in the event of an outbreak.

19. COMMENTS: As Samoa enters a peak travel and tourism season, with the majority of its tourists from New Zealand and Australia, the fight to control the pandemic does not get any easier for Samoa and its officials. Furthermore thousands of Samoans from all over the world belonging to the second biggest Christian denomination in the country have gathered for the annual pilgrimage amidst MOH unheeded suggestions to postpone until after the scare of H1N1 has died down. With Fiji and Tonga now reporting cases, every place with an air connection to Samoa (U.S. mainland, American Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Australia, and New Zealand) have reported cases, making the further spread of the disease, and of any variations, likely.

As the numbers escalate and the limited tamiflu expires or is used up, Samoa will be in dire need of assistance especially in the form of tamiflu and screening materials. Samoa's traditional development partners, Australia and New Zealand, have remained vague on any assistance for Samoa as each currently struggles to handle more per capita cases, including flu-related deaths, than has so far happened in Samoa.

YEAGER